

STATE HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY OF IOWA

IOWA DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS

# The Annals of Iowa

---

Volume 63 | Number 2 (Spring 2004)

pps. 214-215

---

## Americanizing the West: Race, Immigrants, and Citizenship, 1890-1930

ISSN 0003-4827

Copyright © 2004 State Historical Society of Iowa. This article is posted here for personal use,  
not for redistribution.

---

### Recommended Citation

"Americanizing the West: Race, Immigrants, and Citizenship, 1890-1930." *The Annals of Iowa* 63 (2004), 214-215.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.10800>

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](#)

*Americanizing the West: Race, Immigrants, and Citizenship, 1890–1930*, by Frank Van Nuys. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002. xv, 294 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$35.00 cloth.

Reviewer Judith Raftery is professor of history at California State University at Chico. Her research and writing have focused on urban history in the West during the Progressive Era.

Americanization programs peppered the landscape from the end of the nineteenth century, continuing into the 1930s. No matter how ubiquitous these programs were, historians have rarely placed them west of the Mississippi River, except in San Francisco and Los Angeles. Frank Van Nuys's *Americanizing the West: Race, Immigrants, and Citizenship, 1890–1930* offers a chance to learn about Americanization on the Great Plains, in the Rocky Mountain states, as well as in coastal states. To weave his tale, Van Nuys uses the backdrop of the West to examine the complex themes of labor unrest, immigration and the backlash to it, World War I, and the role of Progressive Era reformers.

Van Nuys's West transitioned from frontier to region during the years he considers, and what better way to show the transformation than for western states to adopt attitudes and programs from established areas. As earlier Anglo-American settlement had done, Americanization programs continued to "tame the West" and turn foreigners into citizens. Asian, Mexican, and eastern and southern European immigrants gave western Americanization programs their uniqueness and added new challenges.

Van Nuys moves his narrative state by state, bringing to light some of the differences and similarities between programs. He also makes distinctions between early programs that had been inspired to ameliorate some of the hardships immigrants faced and those established after the outbreak of war in 1914 that aimed at creating citizens. California had one of the most developed programs under the leadership of the state's progressive governor, Hiram W. Johnson, elected in 1911 with the support of the state's newly enfranchised women. Johnson established the California Commission of Immigration and Housing (CCIH), administered by such inveterate progressives as Simon Lubin and Mary S. Gibson, author of the 1915 Home Teacher Act. Wyoming had an expansive program led by Grace Raymond Hebard. Colorado's program was headed by George Norlin, president of the University of Colorado, an immigrant himself. Many of the later programs emanated from university extension courses established for the purpose of "educating for citizenship" (147), such as those offered at the University of Utah. The University of Kansas held classes in factories that included

singing and "appropriate motion pictures" (131). Educational institutions on all levels became centers of Americanization.

The suspicion of immigrant disloyalty made Americanization a national crusade and a national priority espoused by Theodore Roosevelt and Frances Kellor, the most notable Americanizer in the country. Kellor became head of the Committee for Immigrants in America and provided funding and staffing for the Division of Immigrant Education in the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Education. In 1915 Kellor trumpeted the America First campaign. Two federal bureaus—Education and Naturalization—became responsible for coordinating Americanization programs, and that was the rub. Jealousies and non-communication between them signaled that programs would not be coordinated in any meaningful way even though local officials tried, as Van Nuys points out. "Country schoolteachers on the prairies, night school instructors in mining communities, state education officials, university professors, and many other Western Americanizers cooperated closely with the federal Americanization bureaucracy" (148). Some attempts failed, as when the Bureau of Naturalization tried to assimilate agricultural laborers ("mostly Hindoos") working in Brigham City, Utah. Later the bureau admitted that the group was too scattered to organize into a class (153). The bureau had more success in Murray, Utah, at the American Smelting and Refining Company, where 300 immigrants were organized into a public school class. At Rock Springs, University of Wyoming educators established a night school class for foreign adults.

Van Nuys explores efforts by labor, especially the International Workers of the World and the United Mine Workers of America, and the ineluctable strikes in the region as unintended contributors to intensive Americanization efforts. After the Wheatland (California) strike and riot in 1913, state officials extended the CCIH authority; and after mining strikes and the massacre in Ludlow (Colorado) in 1914, the Rockefeller Company established the Industrial Representation Plan at its Colorado Fuel and Iron Company. It offered citizenship training through local YMCAs or public schools as part of its program which, after 1916, merged with the America First Society program of the Colorado State Council of Defense.

In *Americanizing the West*, Van Nuys broadens our view of Americanization programs by locating them in the factories, fields, and towns of the West. Based on extensive archival research, this book would be an effective resource for teachers and scholars interested in presenting a diverse West.

Copyright of *Annals of Iowa* is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.